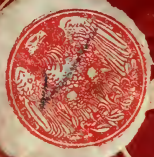

What are we fighting for?

N. Y. 1862

E
458
.2
.W548

Class E458.2
Book W54-8

E 459
W5 A3

153

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

A LETTER TO

HORACE GREELEY.

NEW YORK:
Carleton, Publisher, 413 *Broadway*.
MDCCCLXII.

E458
.2
.W548

63191
05

154

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

A LETTER TO HORACE GREELEY.

HORACE GREELEY:

SIR—Able editor as you are, you seem to be somewhat in the dark. What do you think we are fighting for? Why have we 500,000 men under arms? Why do we spend money at the rate of a million of dollars a day? Why, when we see our friends, our sons, our brothers come back sick and wounded, when we know that some of them shall never return, do we yet, at a word, the scratch of a pen, send fifty thousand more, being some of us part of that fifty thousand?—for we send ourselves. Why, when we as a people are spending a million of dollars daily in this war, do we as individuals give tens, hundreds, thousands to ensure as far as possible the health and comfort of our soldiers? Why, when our brothers are borne out of the ranks maimed and suffering do our sisters throng to the hospitals until the doors have to be closed against their eager feet?

To put down the rebellion.

But why must the rebellion be put down further than it is now? Though Mr. Mason has kept his word and not revisited Boston except as an ambassador, Mr.

Toombs has concluded to postpone indefinitely calling the roll of his slaves in the shadow of Bunker Hill monument; and, although General Pierre Toutant, *alias* Beauregard, has shown his usual disregard of his word in not watering his horse in Hell because he failed to do it in the Tennessee river, still we must allow something to his constitutional failing (which, by the way, seems to be his only Constitutional weakness), and we may rest assured that General Halleck will give him an early opportunity of telling the truth for once since the outbreak of the rebellion, and retiring with his charger to the summer quarters he had in mind. As to Washington, Ex-Senator Davis will probably take that and Heaven by storm together; and so we may sleep in quiet. But in sad and sober earnest, what absolute need is there of a further prosecution of this war? For the need must be surpassing which justifies, not to say hallows, such a sacrifice of blood and treasure as we are making.

Our only and our ample justification is the paramount necessity to this nation, and to the cause of human progress throughout the world, that this Government and the principles of this Government should be maintained, that the Republic shall not be destroyed. We live and act under the abiding consciousness that in this land, and by our race, rational liberty was first established, that here first was every citizen safely placed upon a political equality with every other citizen. We firmly believe that our fathers, building perhaps (wise as they were) "better than they knew," solved the great political problem of strength without centralization, by ensuring national sovereignty and local independence, and making them compatible. We know that the welfare of ourselves and our posterity, and we have a conviction that the hopes of mankind, are bound up in the perpetuation and the prosperity of this Repub-

153

lic, which the finally unseated politicians of the South would rend asunder in their jealous rage. Therefore we fight. We fight for the Republic, for the preservative principle of permanent union against the disintegrative doctrine of confederacy; to secure the blessings of our powerful, beneficent, cheap, lightly-felt government "to ourselves and our posterity." We fight to crush forever the infamous assumption that those who are defeated in an election may then rightfully rebel. The nation has said in effect to the leading politicians of the Slave States, There shall be no more slave territory. They have replied, We will not submit; and we have rejoined, It is both lawful and right that you should submit, and you shall submit, or we will know the reason why. For this we fight. We fight, too, that there may be an end forever of the talk of State sovereignty, of State opposition, or, more absurd, of State neutrality, to the national will constitutionally declared:— that a citizen of the United States may be safe under the protection, if not of local law, then of national law in every part of the country; in South Carolina as well as in Massachusetts, in Mississippi as well as in Ohio:— that the monstrous talk of an "invasion" of one State by the residents of another may be never heard of more; and that a town which resists the passage through it of citizens of the United States, armed or unarmed, by the orders of the President of the United States, shall, if needs must, be laid flat, as flat as the palm of a man's hand, so that an army of grasshoppers may march over it. And finally, we fight for freedom of speech and of the press, that every custom, law, or institution of this country, local or national, may be the subject of free discussion in every part of it, and remain open to the influence of the moral powers that are at work, through Christ's grace, in this world. If there be any institution

in the land which cannot bear this freedom and this discussion, it must go out of the land, and that as soon as may be. For this we fight, and suffer, and sacrifice; and did we not fight, and suffer, and sacrifice for this unto the bitter end, we should be moral bastards, renegades.

But you, sir, honest, able, and truly a lover of your country and your kind, a man whose life has been worth more to others than to himself, you, and a few whom you have led with you, or who were ready to follow any voice that spoke your words, seem to think that we are, or should be, fighting for something else. Some allowance should indeed be made for you in consideration of the binding force of the *Tribune* creed, the cardinal points of which may be conveniently stated as, 1st, that every man should pay his own postage; 2d, that all the fruits of the earth not converted into men or other animals should be returned to the earth as manure; 3d, that every human being should vote. Important points, for the establishment of which a man may honorably labor. But as the world is constituted it happens that there are matters of more pressing moment, which must be first attended to, and among them is the maintenance of the constitutional government of this Republic, for which we are in arms this day. But you, alive to the importance of the third point of the Tribunistic creed, and not seeing that suffrage and citizenship are not natural rights, but privileges, and must needs be so,—you seem to be on tenter-hooks of apprehension lest that government should be sustained Constitutionally, or in any way, without insuring freedom to all slaves, and, at least, the prospect of a vote to all negroes. You vote heartily for the war measure, but you saddle it with your everlasting negro as a rider.

156

Sir, the people of this country have heard enough of this talk, and will no longer bear it. Because disappointed slaveholding politicians have done one wrong, we are not to try to make it right by doing another. By the organic compact, in virtue of which we became a nation, by the very charter of our political existence, the people of every State have a right to manage their local government as they please, so long as they make no law conflicting with "the supreme law of the land." If the people of Massachusetts or New York chose to say that every man may have six wives—of which there is about as much chance as that the Pope will inflict a similar privilege upon all his priests—the people of the other States must needs acquiesce, or rather not acquiesce, which would be impertinence, but simply mind their own business! They might remonstrate; but beyond this the only alternative would be submission or revolution. Now, as to the relations of this nation with the negro, they must be put upon the footing of justice as soon as may be, consistently with justice in regard to immeasurably higher interests. The blight and the blot of slavery must be prevented from spreading by all constitutional means (and they are sufficient); and those who would propagate slavery must submit, whether they like it or not. But as to slavery where it is, admitting all the wrong that it inflicts, and the ruin that it brings upon those who inflict the wrong, that must stand until it is done away by those who are responsible for it. The removal of the curse of slavery from this land is a blessing to be hoped for, to be worked for, and to be looked for, as surely as the establishment of truth and right; the sooner, too, for this wicked, mad, rebellion, which seeks to spread and to perpetuate it. But it must come in by the lawful exercise of the constitutional rights of every citizen of the United States.

The plighted faith of this nation is of greater moment than the immediate freedom of a wilderness of negroes.

We who are sustaining the Government of the United States demand that they who are attacking it, should abide by the Constitution, and seek redress for their wrongs, if they have any, under the Constitution. Who needs to be told that a compact, if insisted upon at all, must be maintained in all its parts? We must ourselves obey the law to which we seek to compel obedience. Let us either abide by the Constitution, or, like men, set it openly at naught. Let not rebels be honester than loyal men. If what the insurgents have said and done has absolved us of our allegiance to the Constitution, let us avow it, and act accordingly. But the people are not quite ready for this conclusion or this course. To insist that South Carolina or Massachusetts shall preserve their allegiance, to a constitution from which something has been taken, or to which something has been added, without consulting her, is to justify her refusal, that is her rebellion, before God and man.

All this you regard not. Your eye is so firmly fixed upon the far off negro's freedom, that you cannot see the immediate peril of your country. You seem to believe that the way to the near lies through the remote. You would put down the rebellion by proclaiming freedom to the slaves. You have even called General Hunter's proclamation of liberty to those in South Carolina and Georgia, assuming to declare their freedom *forever* by his mere temporary martial law, "a blow between the eyes." It was a blow into the empty air; feebleness fulminated into the infinity of space. It is the laughing stock of the world now, and will be that of posterity. Proclaim freedom to slaves for the purpose of putting down the rebellion! Why, where the national army cannot go such a proclamation is not worth the paper

on which it is written; it might as well be promulgated by Mr. Barnum from the top of his museum; and where the army does go, rebellion never existed or is put down already. The effect of such attempts at emancipation can only be to confirm rebellious contumacy, to fulfil rebellious prophecy, and to justify rebellion in all impartial eyes, even among those who hate slavery.

Yet one more remonstrance against one other error, and that a grievous one. You continually affront all of your fellow citizens, except the few who are so perversely constituted as to feel with you, by moaning over the folly of not accepting the services of "the only loyal men," "the real Unionists" of the South, and by your extravagant laudations of "the faithful among the faithless." Forgetting that we are not engaged in war with a foreign foe to whom we seek to do all the harm we can by every means in our power, you ceaselessly demand that the negro slave should be taken into the service of the Republic against its own citizens. Is this folly, or is it craft which seeks to accomplish its purpose by accustoming the people's mind to the idea involved in this phraseology? If the latter, it will fail. It is an offence; an insult; breeding discontent, discord, and disaffection. Loyal! How can he be loyal who owes no allegiance? Faithful! How can he be faithful to whom is committed no trust? Negroes, bond or free, have no share in our Union, and you know it. Cease, then, a use of language both offensive and ridiculous.

But you would give the negro this position which he has not, and your perversion of his desire for freedom into loyalty to a Constitution not made for him, and faith to a cause to which he is not bound, is your entering wedge. Cease this effort, too, unless you would see

your wedge rive society in sunder in the Free States, as well as in the Slave—among the loyal as well as the disloyal. Why? Simply because we will not endure to be mixed up in an equality of *any* sort with negroes. We have civil war now; but the attempt to do this will bring on a worse than civil war, *bellum plusquam civile*. Call this prejudice, if you will. It is, at least, not blind prejudice. The negro is, in a certain degree, offensive to us in any position—as an equal, in any sense, insufferable. Accept this fact; take it as an axiom before you speculate any more upon the subject. It has always been so with our race; and, until human nature changes, it must always be so. Do you ask why? (for there are some men who will ask the why of an instinct or a sentiment.) Why do men loathe a toad? There is no more harmless creature under the sun: a dove is not more timid, a butterfly not more incapable of doing injury. And yet to have one touch your lips! What man, not callous or cowardly, would not sooner charge a rebel battery? Feelings like this are beyond reason, if not above it. Our aversion to the negro in any position which makes equality of intercourse even possible, is of this kind. It is as old as our race; and, it is safe to say, will be as enduring. Who that attends to his dramatic duties, and reads his Shakspeare, forgets that our great poet makes even the Moor "a sooty thing" that Desdemona first "feared to look at," though the individual was that most attractive character to woman-kind, a brave soldier and a successful general. But in the inferior nature and repulsive traits of the negro we find no justification for oppressing him. On the contrary, cause why we should treat him with kindness, and the more because of the wrong which he has suffered at the hands of his superiors. Yet remember well that we fight not for him, but for our own

priceless heritage. We mean to absolve this nation of all responsibility for his enslavement, and by all lawful and constitutional means to purge the whole land of the wrong and the curse of chattel bondage. And—yet greater and higher purpose—we mean to lift the degraded millions of our own race in the Slave States into the dignity of that manhood and that American citizenship which is their birthright. As to the negro, he is with us, but not of us. He is an inhabitant of the land, but not one of its people. In American citizenship he has neither part nor lot. We are not fighting his battles; and shall we be so lost to self-respect as to ask him to fight ours? If after we have made him free, he chooses to remain here, protected by our laws, and treated with Christian kindness, he must yet remain a grotesque blemish upon society, and servile, though not a slave. Offend us no more by grinding us up together with him in your word-mill. Talk no more in the same breath of his loyalty and ours, of his faith and ours. The liberties for which our fathers fought were theirs and ours, not his. The Constitution to which we are loyal was made, not for him, but for us. The flag to which we are faithful is the sign of our nationality, not of his. Confound no more his dumb hope of deliverance from stripes and labor with our patriotism; his self-seeking with our self-sacrifice. Cease to do this, unless you would bring a sword also into the North. Cast down your black idol, and, on week days, worship your country. Do this, and "all things else shall be added unto you," even his freedom; which God grant.

Live the Republic!

POPULUS.

NEW YORK, *May* 31*st*, 1862.

LB D '05

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 012 028 317 0